

In the mid-nineteenth century, river cities like Van Buren, Arkansas were a hotbed of commerce and travel and played a huge part in the settlement of the West. Ms. Ashley brings us an exciting and romantic tale about a woman with multiple secrets who finds a treasure trove in the form of family connections she has been missing for most of her life. This new author does a great job with action and intrigue. Come along for the ride!

— Jenny Carlisle, author of the Crossroads series

*Of Faith and Dreams* is a delightful tale, shadowed by danger, mystery, and sprinkled with romance. Eliza Dawn and Justin pulled me into their world and held me captive until the last page. This debut promises more adventures to come, and I can't wait to tag along.

— Candace West, best-selling author of the  
Valley Creek Redemption series



OF *Faith*  
AND *Dreams*

LOST AND FOUND BOOK 1

TONYA B. ASHLEY



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*To my husband, Rodney, the love of my life—  
there's no one I'd rather have by my side to navigate life's plot twists.*



# Chapter One

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*March 30, 1849*

*Van Buren, Arkansas*

A steamboat's low, moaning whistle wafted in from the river on a cool breeze as the horse stall door creaked open under Justin Hogue's easy touch. He halted Dolly, leading the little dapple-gray filly to the stable yard. "What do you say we get some fresh air, girl?"

He had never experienced anything like the past several months. The city of Van Buren was incorporated only four years ago. His father had predicted rapid expansion, but no one anticipated growth like this. During the eight months since prospectors first flooded into town, Van Buren had more than doubled in population.

Would more prospectors arrive on the boats today? He raked his fingers along his stubbled jaw. Too busy with horses to shave, he was taking a liking to this rugged appearance. His chest puffed out a little when the fellas in town said it made him look like a man. At twenty-six, he was tired of folks teasing him

he resembled a button of a boy and asking when he would grow up. What would Ma think of the stubble?

He winced. Ma was gone. Some days, it still didn't seem real. Pushing the thought away, he returned his attention to the stout filly.

"Hey, girl. Ready to get started?" Justin ran his hand along Dolly's silken neck and patted a couple of times at the withers before resting his hand momentarily. She remained still and relaxed. Turning his back to her head, he faced the rump and moved his hand across her hindquarters and down her leg. He gently squeezed above Dolly's fetlock, and when she lifted her hoof, he wedged it between his knees. Leaning his weight on her, he rocked back and forth slightly. After studying her foot, he released it.

"Your shoes are fine, girl. Just fine." Justin smiled, admiring his farrier work. "With any luck, you'll embark on a long journey soon."

Justin needed to sell seven horses before the first gold expeditions left town in twelve days. Though it was a lofty goal, it shouldn't be too difficult with so many prospectors seeking to outfit themselves with mounts and pack animals. If he could sell all seven, he would have enough money to purchase the land and building supplies to start his horse ranch. Only selling three would give him enough to secure the land. His heart swelled at the thought.

Moving to the back of the horse, he resumed his inspection of Dolly's hooves, though he didn't need to. He had checked them the night before. However, he wanted these horses to be comfortable in the hands of a new owner, so he made this a twice-a-day habit leading up to their sale. After that, it was up to the owner to build trust and familiarity.

He finished the process on the other side and grabbed a brush from the nearby bench.

"Let's get you brushed, sweet girl. Gotta be your finest today.



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Remember what I told you. Stand tall, and don't be shy. You're strong and handsome, just like me." Dolly whinnied, tossing her head. Justin chuckled.

"Justin." His sister, Rebecca, appeared around the side of the stable. "Pa wants you to talk to a potential boarder."

He sighed. He'd told his father about his plans to meet a buyer. Pa probably forgot. That was a common occurrence since Ma's death. He wasn't sure if Pa was disremembering or perhaps wasn't paying attention. Maybe his father hadn't even heard him.

"I don't have time." He brushed Dolly. "Can you remind Pa I've got to get to a sale?"

"Remind him yourself." Rebecca tilted her head, narrowing her eyes. "You can't keep avoiding each other. I won't be your messenger for the rest of my life."

"Fine." Justin rubbed the back of his neck. "If the fella needs a room so badly, ask him to wait on the porch until I return."

"It's a woman."

"A woman?" Justin's eyes snapped to meet hers, and his grip on the brush tightened. "We don't board women. Send her to Bradley House. Why does Pa want me to talk to her?"

Rebecca shrugged. "You know Pa. He can't talk to women."

"Can't talk to women?" Justin scoffed. "He talked to Ma. He's got six daughters, for crying out loud. Can't talk to women."

"That's family." Rebecca put her hands on her hips. "You know he's afraid he'll hurt their feelings. Pa quit talking to Ivajohn, Cordelia, and me when we turned thirteen. He only began talking to Ivajohn again when the pastor started courting her. At any rate, I'm not telling this woman she must go. You're the oldest. I'd get Ivajohn to do it since she's the oldest girl, but she set out for Indian Territory this morning with Pastor Turner and the missionaries. They won't be back until later this week. That leaves you."

With a huff, Justin tossed the brush onto the bench. He'd have to shoot straight, that's all. Make it quick and get to the sale.

Justin followed Rebecca around to the front of the house. On the porch stood a young woman in a simple blue and brown plaid dress with no trunk or bag. Where were her belongings? Surely, Pa and Rebecca didn't allow her to set them inside, especially if Pa wanted to get rid of her.

"Good morning, miss. I understand you're inquiring about a room." He didn't bother getting her name as he stopped at the foot of the steps. No sense getting familiar when he intended to dismiss her. From the corner of his eye, he caught Rebecca making herself comfortable in a rocking chair. She wouldn't send the woman away but would watch him do it. "Unfortunately, we only board men here at Hogue House. You might check with—"

"Bradley House for women is full." She smiled, fingering the button at her collar. "The hotel is more expensive than I can manage. Anything will do. A bunk in the stable. I don't require luxuries."

He eyed her carefully. Creamy, unblemished skin, clean fingernails, delicate hands. She carried herself in a tall, stiffened manner. Though her dress was plain enough, it didn't suit her. It didn't even fit. Women in these parts wore their skirts above the ankle. It was more practical than the longer skirts of the east, but her hemline was nigh unto calf high. Surely, this outfit couldn't be hers. No bags, poorly fitting clothes. Everything about her read trouble.

"Bunkroom is mine." He raked fingers along his whiskered jaw. "Pastor is out of town, but Mrs. Pratt can find a church family to lodge you. How long will you stay?"

"No, no church families." She shook her head, light chestnut tendrils escaping her low bun. "Tried that once. Dreadful nosy. Caught the wife reading my journal."

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"I'm sorry, miss." Justin checked his pocket watch. The tick-ticking propelled the hands closer to his appointment time. Better make dust. "Even if we boarded women, we've no space right now."

"That's not exactly true." The nagging creak of the rocking chair halted. Rising from the rocker, Rebecca broke her silence. "No one is in the lost and found room."

"The lost and found room." Justin chuckled. "There's no bed in the lost and found room. Besides, it's so packed with stuff you couldn't fit a body in there."

"I'll take it." The young woman stepped toward Justin, extending her hand.

Grinding his teeth, he hard-eyed Rebecca. He flicked the pocket watch open and clapped it shut again. Glowering, he held the timepiece in the air and let it drop, dangling from the chain. Rebecca shrugged.

"How much do the men pay?" She pulled a small pouch from a hiding place in her skirt waist and dug out some coins.

"We charge a dollar and fifty cents a week."

"I'll pay two dollars flat."

Rebecca's eyes widened. "You know the women at Bradley House only pay a dollar twenty-five, don't you?"

"Yes, but this is a terrible inconvenience for you."

"Hold on." Justin tucked the watch back into his vest pocket. "The hotel is too expensive, but you're willing to pay more than the men?"

"Well, yes. It's good business sense." She held some coins out to him. "I'm a seamstress. I'm following the prospectors, filling orders for new shirts, and mending work. The hotel asks for two and a quarter a night. So, two dollars a week is much better, and it's fair, providing for your inconvenience."

"Done. Put those away. We'll settle later." Rebecca grabbed her hand, pumping it heartily. "What will you do for a bed, though?"

“There are crates in the room?” She dropped the coins into the pouch and tucked it back into her waistband.

“Yes, several.”

“If you have extra blankets, I can make a pallet.”

“Rebecca, could I talk to you?” Lips pressed tight, Justin motioned to Rebecca to join him. They walked a few paces away, and he spoke in hushed tones. “We don’t even know her name.”

“It’s Eliza. Eliza Dawn,” the woman replied, smiling.

Justin’s head swiveled, and he was momentarily caught in her alluring blue eyes. Then, shaking his head as if waking from a spell, he set his jaw and narrowed his eyes.

She ducked her head, lifted a slender hand, and cleared her throat. “My apologies. I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

Justin dragged Rebecca around the side of the house. “What are you doing? Didn’t you say Pa wants me to get rid of her?”

“No, that’s not what I said. I said Pa can’t talk to women.”

Justin crossed his arms. “Does he want me to get rid of her or not?”

“He didn’t specifically say.” Rebecca shrugged.

“Then what did he say—exactly?”

“He said, ‘Have Justin deal with this.’ And he did that waving thing with his hand. Besides, he’s let you make all the boardinghouse decisions since Ma died.” Rebecca clutched his arms above the elbows. “Justin, it’s two dollars. Two dollars a week. Ollie and Nellie need shoes. Little Edie is bursting at the seams, and Simon shot up another two inches. Cordelia and I could get some nice calico to outfit the family with new shirts and dresses.”

“If I make this horse sale, I can buy all those things.”

“No. Absolutely not.” Rebecca shook her head vigorously. “That’s your ranch money. Ma told you not to let anything keep you from your dream. We are not using that money for shoes and necessities. Ma and I are the first ones you ever told about wanting to start a horse ranch. She warned me you’d wrestle

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with family obligations and let those dreams slip away. I vowed to make sure you kept your promise.”

Justin wrapped his arms around her, pulling her close. She slumped into him, arms slack, shoulders quaking. He rested his chin on her head.

“It’ll be all right.”

“I miss her.” Rebecca’s voice trembled. “So much, every day.”

“I know,” he rasped.

“I wish I knew how to help Pa through the grief.”

“I know.”

Releasing his hold on her, he straightened his back and fixed a smile on his face. “We’ll board this woman on a trial basis. Then, if it doesn’t work out, we’ll call on Mrs. Pratt.”

“Can you sign her in?” Rebecca wiped a tear from the side of her nose. “It’s time for me to start the noon meal, and you know how Pa gets if the meals aren’t on time.”

“Rebecca, I can’t.” Justin groaned. “I’m already late to this sale.”

“Then, when you return. Please, Justin.” Rebecca folded her hands underneath her chin. “You know I don’t like the lost and found room. All that old stuff makes me a might uneasy.”

“Fine then.” Justin rolled his eyes skyward, releasing a long breath. “Keep her occupied until I return. Hopefully, it won’t take long.”

Justin returned to the porch. “Miss—I didn’t get your family name. What was it?”

“I don’t have a family.” Glancing at her feet, Eliza Dawn cleared her throat. “Therefore, no family name. So, call me Eliza Dawn.”

“Miss Dawn,” Justin continued, trying to reconcile his manners with her unconventional moniker, “we’ll lodge you on a trial basis. If it doesn’t work out, we’ll find a church family to help you. That’s the bettermost we can do.”

“I prefer to be called Eliza Dawn.” Eliza Dawn turned to Rebecca. “I’m sure we can make this work. Since I’m paying extra, I don’t intend to contribute to chores for the other boarders, if that’s all right. But you won’t have to do any of my wash or such. I won’t bother you with my needs except for meals.”

“It makes good business sense, considering you’ll have to make a bed for yourself.” Rebecca smiled, waving Eliza Dawn toward the door. “Would you mind helping me with lunch, however? I prefer Justin to show you the room when he returns from his business venture. I’m not fond of the lost and found.”

“I suppose so.” Eliza Dawn followed Rebecca into the house.

“I’m off to meet this buyer. Be back shortly.”

Justin rode as hard as he dared. Pulling up short in front of Mooney’s Mercantile, he slid off the pony’s bare back. At the end of the street, his buyer rode off on another horse. He tilted his head to the side and blinked twice, questioning his vision. A sinewy, blond-haired fellow wearing a green plaid skirt waved to the buyer before mounting his horse and riding in the opposite direction. Justin grimaced as a sinking feeling settled in the pit of his stomach.

“Well, Dolly, perhaps you won’t be going on that journey as soon as I hoped.” Justin tied Dolly to the hitching post and scratched her between the ears. Then, taking the stairs two at a time, he reached the door of the mercantile. Glancing down the street once more, he shook his head. He entered the store and waited by the counter as Sam Mooney finished with a customer.

“Justin, I haven’t seen you much lately.” Sam’s mouth turned up at the corners. “I guess you’ve been at it full chisel with your horses?”

“Yes, sir. I was set to sell that little dapple gray today.” Justin hitched his thumb toward Dolly. “But the buyer just rode off on another horse. Any idea who that blond-haired fella is?”

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Sam rounded the counter and peered out the window. “Reddish beard, short-trimmed?”

Justin nodded. “That’s the one.”

“Scottish emigrant, a prospector. Downright hard to understand.” Sam retrieved a box of canned goods to restock some shelves. “Put a notice on the board out front. Has some horses to sell. Calls ’em Highland ponies and claims there’s no finer pack animal.”

“What’s that thing he’s wearing?”

“That skirt? Called it a kilt. Talkative fellow.” Sam picked a can from the box and tossed it from one hand to the other, settling into a quick, easy rhythm. “Had to ask him to repeat everything.”

“Just how many horses does he plan on selling?”

Sam shrugged. “Several, to hear him talk. Trying to sell enough to purchase a wagon and supplies. Gold rush has got people buying up everything.”

Justin crossed to the window. Hooking his finger at the edge of the yellow gingham curtain, he drew it aside. Wagons lined the street, horses trotted at a leisurely clip, folks bustled from shop to shop. He wouldn’t have missed the sale if he hadn’t been distracted by that woman at the boardinghouse. Now, there was new competition with the owner of these Highland ponies. It wasn’t shaping up to be a great day.

“You’re staying busy.” Justin returned his attention to Sam. “I guess gold fever is good for business.”

“Yes and no. What folks aren’t buying, they’re thieving.” Sam stopped stocking and turned to Justin. “Your Pa was right when he predicted this town would explode with growth. He was also right when he said lawlessness follows growth. So, tell your family and boarders to keep anything they cherish locked up, or they’ll lose it.”

“Will do. Say, Sam, did you happen to get that fella’s name?”

“No. Ought to be on the notice outside.” Sam shook his

head. “You still splitting time between the boardinghouse and Levi’s?”

“Yes, sir. Only three stalls are available at the boardinghouse for my sale horses. Our family horses and the pastor’s horse occupy the other stalls.” Justin joined Sam. Picking a couple of airtights out of the box, he searched the shelves. He placed the cans with a clunk and grabbed two more. “Since I helped Levi build the new forge at his place, he was kind enough to let me build a temporary horse shelter with six stalls and a lean-to. It’s not ideal, but I can stay overnight when I need to and keep more horses there.”

“How many horses you got there now?”

“Four. Made good progress with them. They’re well-grounded, ready to ride and pack.” Justin grinned. “Of course, none of them are lacking in personality.”

“Well, you ought to be able to sell plenty to these prospectors.”

“Oh, sure.” The image of Eliza Dawn in her too-short dress flashed in his mind. “Provided I don’t have too many distractions.”

“I always send anyone in the market for horses in your direction.” Sam smiled, patting Justin on the shoulder. “It’ll all work out. Listen, when you see Levi, let him know we miss having him and his forge at the boardinghouse. People fuss when I tell them where to find him now.”

“I know what you mean. Folks still call on me for simple projects since I was his apprentice.” Another distraction he didn’t need. “They’re a might sour about the distance. But you know Levi. If town grows too close to him, he’ll move again.”

Sam laughed. “I don’t know what we’d do if he got too far away. Say, Simon stopped by one day after school. Said he’s been doing some riding for you.”

“That he has. That kid brother of mine is getting pretty good at trick riding. Although, I don’t know why a person wants to do



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such stunts on a horse. As a kid, walking the ridge of the roof was daredevil enough for me.” Justin placed two more cans and chuckled. “Course, now I think a man doesn’t need to be any higher than a saddle, but I wouldn’t risk my neck doing crazy stunts atop a moving horse.”

“Well, that’s all part of growing up.” Sam paused to eye Justin. “Weren’t long ago you were between grass and hay. Now, you’re setting your own hook in this horse business. Wish your ma could see how fine a man you’ve become.”

A lump settled in Justin’s throat. “Thanks for the chat, Sam.” He shook Sam’s hand and strolled to the front door. “I’ll check that notice board on my way out.”

Outside, the notice board overflowed with announcements and advertisements. One, in particular, caught his eye. It read:

*Seamstress Work*

*Shirts: \$1.50*

*Mending: 50¢*

*Contact Eliza Dawn at Hogue House*

Justin’s brow furrowed, and he bit the inside of his lip. He found the notice he was searching for beside Eliza Dawn’s advertisement.

*Highland Ponies*

*Best pack animals this side of the Mississippi*

*Ewan MacKinnon, Scottish Prospector Camp, north side  
of town*

MacKinnon. At least now Justin knew something about his competition.